New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1946

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THEATRE OPENINGS

"Jeb"
"Antigone"

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NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
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NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
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"Jeb"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

FEBRUARY 22, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Moving and Disturbing

A DRAMA of high eloquence and indignation has come to the Martin Beck Theater. "Jeb" considers the not unfamiliar theme of a Negro war hero, who tries to fit himself into a society which has been pleased to have him fight against intolerance, but treats him with savage bigotry. Robert Ardrey has considered the subject squarely and savagely. Like "Deep Are the Roots," this Herman Shumlin production backs up impassioned writing with good acting and excellent stagecraft. If it remains somewhat wanting, it is because Ardrey has paid more attention to saying something across footlights than the manner in which it has been stated. That is not a grave fault.

For "Jeb" has the great quality of sincerity which will always make any piece of theater arresting. On the whole, it is both moving and disturbing. Not content to underline post-war racial discrimination in the Deep South, the author has conceived a powerful scene in which Negro rolls Negro in what might well be Harlem. He has been equally insistent that the central problem of his play must be solved on its home grounds. Scene after scene is filled with ringing dialogue and theatrical imagination. It is only a pity that the dramatic construction is so loose that the piece straggles off into a series of codas after building to a superb crescendo.

* * *

The plot is so simple that it needed no laboring. After four years with the engineers in the Pacific, Jeb gets clipped in a Negro hot spot and returns to his home in Louisiana only to find that he is not wanted in a white man's job which he knows well. In a bumbling attempt to prove to himself that he is a wizard on an adding machine, which the Army him, he almost gets lynched and brings shame and ruination on his people. Granted that there is no simple resolution of the dramatic drives that are implied in the exposition, the fact remains that Ardrey has muddled up his climax and his ending rather badly.

* * *

The offering doeos not want for acting. Ossie Davis, in the title role, gives a supremely assured portrayal of a rather confused colored boy, who wants nothing more than to be home and pound an adding machine. Laura Bowman, as his staunchly pessimistic mother, is splendid and Carolyn Hill Stewart is cynically right as a Harlem hustler. Ruby Dee plays the part of the returned war hero's sweetheart with a bit too much emphasis, but Santos Ortega is perfect as the mill foreman who would like to hire the colored boy. His anguished cry: "I didn't invent the Sputh" lends a lucidity to the proceedings which they do not always possess. Shumlin has staged "Jeb" with meticulous care. It is a play to bother one's thinking as well as one's feelings. Ardrey has contributed something of significance to the season, even if he hight have fashioned his play with more skill.

"JEB," a play by Robert Ardrey, with scenery and lighting by Jo Mielziner. Directed and presented by Herman Shumlin at the Martin Beck Theater with the following cast:

Sally.....Morris McKenney
Tom.....Charles Holland
Cynthia.....Carolyn Hill Stewart
Hasy Johnson.....Wardell Saunders
Jeb Turner.....Ossie Davis
Bush.....J. Jay Sidney
Plabber.....Percy Verwayen
Simpson.....G. Harry Belden
Mr. Toulf.....W. J. Hackett
Amanda Turner.....Laura Bowman
Rachel.....Nori Ortiz
Libby George.....Ruby Dee
Libe.....Rudolph Whitaker
Jefferson.....Christopher Bennett
Julian.....Maurice Ellis
Paul Devoure.....Santos Ortega
Mrs. Devoure.....Grace McTarnahan
Charles Bard.....Frank M. Thomas
Dr. Hazelton.....Edwin Cushman
Mr. Gilbert.....Grover Burgess
Joseph.....Milton Ehrlah
Mr. Dowd.....Edward Forbes
White man.....Owen Hewitt

Synopsis—Act I, Scene 1: The Elite Cafe, in the Negro section of a Northern city. A spring evening. Scene 2: Amanda Turner's kitchen, in a small Louisiana town. Dusk, a few days later. Scene 3: The Devoure back parlor. An afternoon about two weeks later. Act II, Scene 1: The timekeeper's shed at the sugar mill. That night. Scene 2: Amanda's kitchen. Later that night. Scene 3: Behind Dr. Hazelton's church. The next evening. Scene 4: The Elite Cafe. An evening, some weeks later.

PM Exclusive

FEBRUARY 23, 1946

—Kronenberger—

A Negro GI Goes Home

PM Reviews

I must agree with most of my colleagues that *Jeb* is neither a good play nor sufficiently sustained theater. The man in the street will want more action than it provides, and the discriminating playgoer will want more art. Mr. Ardrey has not quite enough story to tell, and has not told it with consistent vigor or sense of progression. Too many of his scenes break off from one another, too many run on for too long, and those near the end are too repetitious. Nor, in telling of the return of a Negro soldier to the South, is Mr. Ardrey just an imperfect craftsman. He is also an unconvincing psychologist. His main character seems superimposed on his environment rather than native to it; some of his minor characters are the merest stereotypes. And some of his talk, for that matter, has too familiar a ring, involves too strident a remonstrance.

Yet I must partly diverge from the majority of the reviewers, for though *Jeb* falls down as art and falls short as theater, it has a definite if not altogether definable claim on the serious playgoer. It gives you some kind of valid sober emotion; it disturbs you as this kind of play should try to disturb—with none of that concurrent, analgesic exhilaration that—as I think is a little true of *Deep Are the Roots*—lets many people think they are being roused by the importance of the theme when they are actually being het up by the excitement of the plot. (This is no plea for earnestness at the cost of enjoyment; but the two should proceed from the same thing, *and at the same level*). Possibly what always kept some hold on me in *Jeb* was something I felt in the author rather than in the play. Without succeeding as artist, psychologist or perhaps even as social commentator, Mr. Ardrey conveyed an integrity of emotion. He showed a real concern, a real feeling for what he was writing about. And that, unlike mere sincerity, is something that can create a response, that can make you feel, too. Beyond that *Jeb*, has, decidedly, its well-written scenes and its stirring ones.

* * *

A war hero who has lost a leg, Jeb Turner comes home to Louisiana. He has earned how to operate an adding machine, but has not learned that the town won't let a Negro have a "white man's job." When he attempts, with some help from a sympathetic mill manager, to buck the town's decree, he runs into trouble, and is falsely accused of being seen with a white girl. This time he attempts to buck the town's wrath, but has finally to flee up North. Still unshaken, he is determined to go back home and fight again.

By making Jeb, from the first, a simple, trusting, courageous character, Mr. Ardrey had made his actions, throughout the play, consistent enough. The trouble with Jeb is that he shows a naivete about the ways of the South that would be almost impossible in some one who had never lived there. He attempts to fight the town, not protestingly, not defiantly, but almost, it would seem, disbelievingly. Hence one's own reaction is largely disbelief. Furthermore, Jeb repeats his stand in each of the play's last three scenes—which, while it reinforces his character, virtually halts the movement of the play.

* * *

If the play pads and backtracks, the reason is at any rate a commendable one. Mr. Ardrey wanted to tell no more nor less than Jeb's story. And Jeb's simple, largely uncontrived story does keep one's emotion channeled, even if one's interest fluctuates. You care more about what is happening than at plays that, theatrically, are much more effective.

The production is not all of a piece; but Ossie Davis is, at any rate, excellent in much the most important role. He makes Jeb a believable person, if not quite a believable Southern Negro. Laura Bowman is good as Jeb's mother, and I liked Carolyn Hill Stewart in a bit part. But most of the others in the cast are seldom more than adequate. Ruby Dee plays Jeb's frightened girl too obviously, and in the most "interesting" part in the play, that of the sympathetic mill manager, Santos Ortega seemed pretty much of a stage type. Mr. Shumlin's direction was excellent in the best scenes, though it could not always take up the slack of the weaker ones; and here and there it abetted the declamatory side of Mr. Ardrey's writing. Jo Mielziner has done some satisfying sets.—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 22, 1946

By Burton Rascoe

'Jeb' Strains for Tear, but They Left Out Eliza on Ice

During the recent past and the current season there have been on and off Broadway, quite a number of plays dealing with the problem of white discrimination against the Negroes—from the current, deserved success "Deep Are the Roots" to "Strange Fruit," ffom "A Young American" to "Caukey," and further back, from "Rope" to "Walk Hard." Whatever limitations some of these may have had, they have been presented with dignity, a certain artistic balance, a sense of reality and a degree of emotional drive.

Capitalizing on a Trend.

Last night at the Martin Beck Theater I could detect no creative or emotional urge in the writing of "Jeb" at all. It seemed to me as if Robert Ardrey, the author, had said to himself: "Plays and novels dealing with white injustice to the Negro are in fashion now; so are shows with an all-Negro or mixed Negro and white cast. I will pull all the stops and fill the air with misery and lamentations, white brutality and Negro fears. I'll top 'em all.

"My hero will be a Negro who has lost a leg in the South Pacific, won the Silver Star and the Purple Heart, and achieved three rows of service ribbons speckled with combat stars. I'll have him drugged and robbed by his own people in Harlem, have him beaten to a pulp by Southern whites in his native Louisiana town on a false charge of consorting with a white girl; I'll make him the innocent cause of the burning to the ground of all the Negro hovels in a barbaric Southern town. My whites will be vicious Simon Legrees who pit the poor whites against the subjugated and impoverished Negroes. I'll fill the stage with cute, innocent Negro children and Negro adults, cringing and afraid. I'll put in a wonderful old Negro mother who cooks her boy catfish and greens and serves him potlikker and corn bread. And I'll make all the whites, except one, the lowest breed of skunks imaginable."

Laid on Thick.

Whether that was Mr. Ardrey's conscious aim or not, that is exactly what he achieved. And Herman Shumlin, who directed as well as presented the play, has aided and abetted him in laying it on thick. Grover Burgess, in the role of the town banker, is coached to make like the villainous crook banker in a Western movie. Ruby Dee, the hero's sweetheart, shivers, cries and cringes like one of the "Orphans in a Storm." Carolyn Hill Stewart, in the role of a Harlem harlot, dresses and deports herself like a harpy in old Pathe film about Paris spaches. And he has caused all the others except four —Ossie Davis, Laura Bowman, Grace McTarnahan and Edward Forbes, the last two in small bits —to overplay their parts even more than they are written.

The only real hero of the evening's proceedings, to my mind, was Jo Mielziner, who designed and lighted the six different sets with ingenuity, imagination, taste and for maximum dramatic effect. Mr. Davis, as the hero, has poise, restraint, considerable range of emotional projection and an ingratiating personality. But his talents are nearly smothered by the requirements of a role as the most put-upon noble man in literature since Jean Valjean.

****

Journal and American

FEBRUARY 22, 1946

'Jeb' Makes Bow At the Martin Beck

By ROBERT GARLAND

Everything connected with "Jeb" is better than the play itself. Including its intention. As producer-director of this new theatre-piece by Robert Ardrey, Herman Shumlin has done more than right by his playwright, his players and their joint footlighted efforts to present the problem of the returning American soldier who happens to be a Negro.

At the Martin Beck, the GI Jeb who lent his name to last night's offering is given every opportunity. By Mr. Shumlin, that is, who sets forth the sadistic story of the unhappy Negro and his unhappy homecoming as if it were the great play it is not, who has directed it as if he were trying to convince himself of its greatness against his own better judgment.

It is Mr. Ardrey who frustrates —I could have written "gangs up on"—his GI Jeb in episode after episode, who pushes him around, who makes him do unthinking things which are consistently out of character. The Jeb Turner that Robert Ardrey creates, and Ossie Davis breathes life into, would not fall into the booby traps set for him by his acrimonious creator.

In "Jeb," the playwright is a veritable Hound of Heaven, pursuing his victim down the days, from Harlem to Louisiana, from Louisiana back again to Harlem. You hear his baying even after the final curtain falls.

• • •

Out of Luck

Your dramatist-with-a-message is harder than need be on his Brett Charles, his Tracy Deen, his William Farrell and now his Jeb Turner. After all, these Negro boys are no strangers in the white, unworthy world in which they live. Especially our GI Jeb who, returning from the South Pacific to Louisiana by way of Harlem, acts like a man from Mars.

First, he allows himself to be robbed of his mustering-out money in the most obvious motion-picture fashion. Then, out of uniform and in his small hometown, he makes one faux pas after another, until, the Deep South being what it should not be, his past, present and future come crashing down around him, forcing him to flee, battered, bruised, disillusioned.

So you leave him where you found him, in the big city's Elite Cafe where, a few weeks earlier, his own people had double-crossed him by means of a lady of the evening, a dropped hand-bag and a mickey finn. Nobody, you tell yourself, could remain as dimwitted as Robert Ardrey's Jeb and be as well-liked, well-seasoned and well-decorated a GI as he.

When you depart from the Martin Beck you come to the conclusion that Jeb Turner will know no real happiness until Playwright Ardrey stops hounding him from scene to scene, from act to act, from Harlem to Louisiana and back again.

• • •

GI Job

The GI Jeb, who is also a GI Job, is simply and sincerely portrayed by the Ossie Davis you could have seen—but probably did not—in "Joy Exceeding Glory," "On Striver's Row" or "Black Woman in White," all up Harlem way. Mr. Davis, it seems, understands his returning soldier's problems better than Mr. Ardrey does. Why not? Mr. Davis was actually a Negro overseasman.

Laura Bowman is as moving as she can be as Jeb's sad, South-broken mother. Santos Ortega strives not unsuccessfully to lend plausibility to Jeb's implausible behavior. The others do as they are told to do under Herman Shumlin's devoted direction. They, through Mr. Shumlin, give their best to Robert Ardrey's bedevilled Louisianians.

The scenery and lighting of Jo Mielziner are imaginative, in keeping with the producer-director's intentions. So are the costumes of Patricia Montgomery. But, in "Jeb," Robert Ardrey remains the promising playwright of, say, "Thunder Rock" and "How to Get Tough About It." At the Martin Beck, only the on-stage adding machine seems real. That is strictly Burroughs...

I have a friend, Walder Davis, who, like the *deus ex machina* in "Jeb," is a Negro. Only the other day he wished that white people would stop making Negroes act like colored people. Right here and now, so do I!

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 22, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Robert Ardrey's "Jeb," which Herman Shumlin offered at the Martin Beck last evening, is a play on racial intolerance, the third of the current season. For it Mr. Ardrey has written several moving and stirring scenes, which Mr. Shumlin has directed and the actors perform with the highest artistry of the theatre. But, on strictly dramatic terms, "Jeb" is not all of a piece. Much of its story is leisurely told, and too often it gives way to discussions without conflict. Because of its substance and honesty, it is the type of play which has an audience always on its side, but "Jeb," in sober truth, does not hold up its share on the scales. The suggestion for a great and stirring play is there, but it is not realized.

* * *

The comparison with "Deep Are the Roots" is inevitable, for both plays deal with the Negro veteran returning to the South. In the case of "Jeb," he is a former sugar field hand, the winner of the Silver Star and Purple Heart, who goes back home with a trade taught him in the Army. He can operate an adding machine. He tries to get a job running the machine in a mill, but while the present clerk is a drunkard and no good, the job is a white man's, and Jeb is denied. He enters the mill one night to see whether he still can work the machine, is accused of having a white girl with him and is beaten and forced to leave town. The final scene shows him in a Negro district of a city, deciding there he will not stay North but will return home.

Mr. Ardrey is honest in that he has used more than the two extremes in painting the figure in his scene. One of his whites is a good man who tries, if unsuccessfully, for tolerance. Some of his Negroes are evil. Just out of the Army, Jeb had been robbed of his money in a Negro cafe. In plotting out his minor characters the author has been less successful because he clung too closely to the lecture platform and to habit. The banker who controls the mill is all bad; the Southern lady is a fool; the elderly minister will take no sides. The people are too pat; they do not belong in the same play with the thoughtful white and the robbing Negro cafe. Their moments on the stage slow the play, not because they do not exist in life, but because Mr. Ardrey has no time or inclination to make individual human beings of them.

In the large cast Ossie Davis and Santos Ortega give the best performance in what are the leading roles. Mr. Davis, as Ossie, is straightforward and often touching. Mr. Ortega, as the weak but earnest mill manager, gives a reserved interpretation of what might easily become an overly played part. Ruby Dee is Jeb's girl, who waited through the war for him but at the end cannot face trouble and so deserts, and Laura Bowman is Jeb's mother. Perhaps the best scene of the play is when Jeb tries the adding machine in the mill at night; that has power, drama and suspense, and Mr. Shumlin has directed accordingly. In other scenes, notably outside a church while Jeb is being hunted, are a bit lingering. Jo Mielziner's setting and the lights which bathe them, are excellent.

The Sun

FEBRUARY 22, 1946

'Jeb' Is Honest and Outspoken, but Misses Being Actually a Good Play.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"Jeb," the third racial-problem play of the current season, presented last night at the Martin Beck Theater by Herman Shumlin, is an honest and angry play, if not actually a good one. It is rather loosely constructed, it runs down toward the finish, and the ending is very flat.

Robert Ardrey wrote "Jeb." His play hasn't the tightness of "Deep Are the Roots" and it lacks something of the eloquence of "Strange Fruit," but the author, is dealing with conflict between the races, does not show a one-sided picture. Some of his Negroes are revealed to be quite as dishonest and as contemptible as his whites. There is considerable force to a lot of the writing.

One of the principal faults of "Jeb," however, is that it frequently becomes declamatory. And it doesn't hold together from one scene to another. Ardrey has written his play with a feeling of alarm and it is undoubtedly his conviction that the country's post-war race problem is one to be given immediate attention.

The author of "Thunder Rock" and "How to Get Tough About It" is now writing of a young Negro G. I., decorated for heroism in the Pacific. He returns, minus a leg, to his small-town home in the Louisiana delta country after an absence of four years. He wants a better understanding between whites and blacks—and a better job. The Army taught him to run an adding machine, so he tries to become time keeper at the sugar mill, a job held by an aged and shiftless white man who is to be fired for drunkenness.

That man spread the lie that Jeb took a white girl into the timekeeper's shed at night. Jeb is beaten by a mob and flees to the North, returning to the Negro-operated cafe bar in which he was robbed on his return from the war. But Jeb finds that he cannot stay in the North. To him the South is home; the bayou country is in his blood. He feels that there is still a place for him and that he can get people to listen to him. He makes the decision to return, regardless of the consequences.

Some of the scenes in "Jeb" are theatrically effective, such as that in which the young soldier demonstrates his mastery of the adding machine. But the play suffers from the fact that it frequently becomes long-winded and that the whole of it is not up to the quality of its better moments. And some of the characters, I thought, are too broadly drawn. There is some excellent scenery from Jo Mielziner.

Herman Shumlin, who did the staging, has found a cast that is generally good. Ossie Davis is a fine choice for the role of Jeb. He is easy, natural, believable and genuinely affecting as the simple, home-loving, peace-loving, bewildered war hero who seeks to make a better place for himself in the world and who gets pushed around by fanatically prejudiced white people and by his own race as well. Laura Bowman gives a good characterization as Jeb's mother and so does Santos Ortega as the mill manager, an ineffectual liberal in a bigoted community, one in which no Negro dares to aspire to a white man's job. There are first-rate performances from Maurice Ellis, Morris McKenney, Ruby Dee and Grover Burgess.

"Jeb" is a sincere, outspoken, awkward drama. It misses—but not by very much.

New York

Motion Picture Critic's Reviews

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DAILY NEWS

FEBRUARY 22, 1946

'Jeb' Honestly Written, Well Acted —But Spotty in Dramatic Effect

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Robert Ardrey's "Jeb," another drama about the tragic lot of the Negro in the South—and here in New York, too—has in it fine qualities of sincerity and clear thinking. But wordiness often robs it of its dramatic drive. Its many scenes progress somewhat unsteadily to the climax, and its end, as written and staged, does not quite do justice to its own message.

Herman Shumlin gave a thoughtful, thorough production of "Jeb" at the Martin Beck last night, and as was to be expected of Shumlin and his players there were some very good performances. Negroes must be born actors, for always there is the right man or the right woman for the right part. Ossie Davis in the title role, Ruby Dee as his girl and Laura Bowman as his mother are excellent, and so are many others in a large company.

The outline of any drama about Negroes and whites in the South is as inevitable as the outline of a Greek tragedy, and must be as tragic. If the central character is a black man he is either beaten or killed by a prejudice-inflamed, ignorant white mob. If one decent white man is involved he is defeated before he starts.

And thus it is with "Jeb"—only Mr. Ardrey ends on a note of hope which is not usual in the race-problem drama. His Negro boy has guts and an idea that he can do something. After having been beaten and driven to New York from Louisiana, he will not give up. He is going back; going back to do something about his own problem himself. There must, he says, be white people who will help and he is going to find them.

All He Wants Is Work.

Jeb is a war hero who returns from the Pacific minus a leg and plus some medals and a new trade. The army has taught him a trade—running an adding machine. The army also has given him a very good artificial leg and he has nothing but enthusiasm upon his return. All he wants is a good job and to marry his girl.

But the good job isn't forthcoming. The mill manager, a decent white man, wants to give Jeb the work he's obviously fitted for—operating an adding machine; but this can't be done because this is white men's work and a Negro can't do a white man's job no matter how good he is.

The plot manipulations are obvious enough. Poor Jeb, puzzled because they won't let him do something he's good at, has a brush with an old white drunk who slaps his girl. The drunk spreads lies to his white-trash friends, and soon a mob is burning Negro homes and hunting down the war hero.

They don't kill him. Just beat him. As a cynical friend in Harlem remarks later, they don't do so much killing in the South any more. It gets in the papers.

There are some good exciting scenes, and some moving ones, and a fine performance by Santos Ortega as the mill manager. But again there are scenes that are overwritten, and too often one character or another says, "I got to talk to you"—and then proceeds to talk. The dramatic effect of the end, in which Jeb with great moral courage renounces his girl and faces South once more, is robbed of much of its punch by loose work.

Jo Mielziner's sets are simple and very helpful to the play.

New York Post

FEBRUARY 22, 1946

Robert Ardrey's 'Jeb' Is a Disappointing Play

By VERNON RICE

It is about time someone presented a play about the Negro problem written by a Negro.

We have had several plays of late about the problem written by white people, some good, some bad, some indifferent. All of them sympathetic.

And yet, those that I have seen, sympathetic though they are to the cause, have the same faults. The playwrights have been unable to get really deep into the Negroes' souls and into their hearts and to express, in terms of characterizations, the great tragedy and conflict that must be theirs.

It would have been the same in Richard Wright's "Black Boy," had it been ghost written by someone not of his race.

We, who are not Negroes, can only report what we see and how we think they feel.

Because of our deficiencies, we turn to two things, melodrama and stage effects.

And so it was last night at the Martin Beck, where Herman Shumlin presented Robert Ardrey's "Jeb."

Tells a Good Tale

Mr. Ardrey is probably our worst offender. He had, though, a good tale to tell; that of a Negro war hero, Jeb, who returns to his native South, after four years in the Pacific, with an aluminum leg, where one of his old ones used to be.

Jeb wants nothing more than to get home again, get married and to go to work at the job he learned in the army—working an adding machine. He loves the adding machine. An adding machine is to him what the violin is to Heifetz.

He is, however, in Louisiana, and in small towns in that state, no Negro goes to work in a white man's office, with white people, in a white man's job.

So far, so good.

Now the playwright begins to go astray.

He pits his protagonist up against about as weak and spineless a character as has been seen on the stage for some time, his old boss. The boss would like to help the boy, but is scared to do so.

In an interview with Jeb, he purposely rattles the boy so that Jeb might think he doesn't know his job. In order to prove to himself that he does, Jeb, with his girl, steals into the timekeeper's shed of the mill where he wants to work, and is caught by the drunken old timekeeper.

A minor struggle ensues, but because of this, Jeb's home is burned to the ground, he is beaten, when trying to enter a church to explain to the congregation his stand, and he is chased out of town.

The one good twist to this story is that after Jeb gets North he decides to return to the South to try once again to make the white people see his side.

Mielziner to the Rescue

When the plot starts slipping Jo Mielziner, with his eerie lighting effects and his mood sets, tries to come to the rescue, but as the function of such things is only to aid in story telling and to help establish the mood, there were times when they even took on a pseudo quality, effective as they were within themselves.

Mr. Shumlin's direction was as uneven as some of the playing. Ossie Davis in the title role, Laura Bowman as Jeb's mother, Christopher Bennett playing Jeb's friend, and Grover Burgess as Mr. Gibney, the drunken old timekeeper, however, did turn in first rate performances.

Much interest has been whipped up as to "Jeb's" similarity to "Deep Are the Roots." To ease what tension there might be over the question, let me quickly say that the only likeness the two plays have is that they both have Negro boys returning from World War II to the south. The stories the plays tell, the approach to the subject matter, the characters and characterizations are entirely different.

As a matter of fact, "Jeb" will probably make "Deep Are the Roots" seem a much better play than it actually is.

And there will be no remarks about Mr. Ardrey being the promising young playwright, please.

****

"Antigone"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

FEBRUARY 19, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

A Neo-Greek Cornell

KATHARINE CORNELL has chosen a curious piece of theater for her latest Thespian obeisance. "Antigone," which the celebrated actress-manager is presenting at the Cort in association with Gilbert Miller, takes leave of contemporary stage conventions in more than one instance. While the hand of Sophocles may still be discerned in the essential, tragic theme of the work, the Greek classic has gone through numerous mutations. Part political tract, part stylized poetic drama, telescoped into an hour and a half's playing time without intermissions and garbed in tails and tea gowns, the new offering is more interesting than satisfying.

Miss Cornell herself is far more exciting than her material. Her sorcery is still constant, as she plays the proud princess of Thebes, who prefers death to the acceptance of unjust edicts by a tyrant and usurper. Whether she is defying Creon in a scene which is electric with the flow of words across a stage, or is becoming pathetically helpless and frightened with her old nurse, she brings poise and eloquence to a role which is not well defined in the production. With Sir Cedric Hardwicke contributing a restrained and powerful portrayal of the "rational and persuasive tyrant," the acting is upper-case at the Cort.

* * *

The play itself is a bit tenuous for comfort, even in its foreshortened format. It is derived from a French adaptation of the original Greek by Jean Anouilh, which confounded the Nazis during the occupation of France, for the simple fact that it said a lot of things for the resistance movement that could have been said in no other manner. Lewis Galantiere has made the piece over into more or less colloquial English, hewing close to its original intentions. Raymond Sovey, with his simple and effective setting, and Valentina, with her quietly expensive costumes, have added the right touch of decor. For all of these assets, the piece is even more remote and dramatically inarticulate than one who saw it in Paris shortly after the liberation remembers it.

* * *

Much of the original form of a Greek tragedy has been suggested in the treatment. There is an interlocutor, serving as the chorus, defining the distinction between tragedy and melodrama and foreseeing the inevitable travail of the principals. Horace Braham is a bit mannered in the role, but it is not an easy one to do in a white tie. Wesley Addy has a fugitive moment or two as Creon's nice son, who was to have married Antigone until the latter incurred the wrath of her uncle by trying to bury her dead brother. Bertha Belmore is excellent as the nurse, but most of the other participants are whisked in and out of the proceedings so speedily that they are for all the world like movie extras. A notable exception is George Mathews, who lends a bit of gusto to the part of the head guard. Chiefly, "Antigone" is an acting exercise for Miss Cornell and Hardwicke, with the latter taking the major honors.

"ANTIGONE," adapted by Lewis Galantiere from the play by Jean Anouilh; setting by Raymond Sovey, costumes by Valentina, and staged by Guthrie McClintic. Presented by Katharine Cornell in association with Gilbert Miller at the Cort Theatre.

THE CAST

Chorus	Horace Braham
Antigone	Katharine Cornell
Nurse	Bertha Belmore
Ismene	Ruth Matteson
Haemon	Wesley Addy
Creon	Cedric Hardwicke
First Guard	George Mathews
Second Guard	David J. Stewart
Third Guard	Michael Hayden
Messenger	Oliver Cliff
Page	Albert Biondo
Eurydice	Marie Maddern

DAILY NEWS

FEBRUARY 19, 1946

Cornell's 'Antigone' Interesting Switch on the Ancient Sophocles

By JOHN CHAPMAN

As a play, Katharine Cornell's "Antigone" is an interesting stunt. As a commentary on the ways of dictators it is persuasive and has some intellectual weight. As a tragedy in the pure Greek style it is something less than effective, for tragedy must be unswerving, inevitable, relentless—and the new "Antigone" makes frequent excursions into high comedy and a dip or two into low comedy.

As a performance by Miss Cornell it is informed with all the art at this lady's command and it has flashes of grandeur; but always Miss Cornell's antagonist is Cedric Hardwicke — and I cannot think of a tougher one. Sir Cedric, schooled and skilled in the cold, motionless demeanor of the older Guitry, is a solid rock against whom almost any player may fling himself with might and main . . . and achieve only bruises for himself.

A scene cannot be taken from an actor who is never off balance, be he tragedian or comedian; nor can it even be dominated. So, it seemed to me at the Cort Theatre last night, this modern-dress version of Sophocles was Hardwicke's play. I felt that the tyrant and not Antigone had won. I felt at the end that the tyrant would still go on being himself, even though he had had some nasty knocks, and that he not yet come to realize the import of Sophocles' own last lines:

"Taught by adversity, old age learns, too late, to be wise."

An Ancient Fascist.

Tragedy had not yet caught up with him as the curtain fell, and therefore something had been lost from the play. The splendid fight of the doomed Antigone for the things of the spirit as against the privileges of dictatorship had not come to complete fruition.

The ancient Greek "Antigone" involves two sons and two daughters of mother-loving Oedipus, lately departed king of Thebes, and his brother-in-law, Creon, who has now become king. The two brothers have had a civil war and have killed each other and Creon, full of righteousness and edicts, has ordained that one of the brothers be left unburied—carrion for dogs and vultures. Antigone, a sister, defies the edict, heaps earth upon the dishonored corpse and is buried alive for punishment. This sets off a chain of suicides which rocks old Creon to his base.

So it is with Miss Cornell's play. The gentlemen wear white ties, the Chorus, being a sort of waiter explaining the menu to the audience, wears a black tie; and the women wear Valentina gowns. But it still is ancient Thebes—although it might be Paris under the German occupation.

A Parisian Hit.

This version comes from Paris, where it was produced in 1943 and is running yet. The work of Jean Anouilh, it was a devilishly clever flaunting of Nazi authority—for playing with Nazi consent, it exposed the foibles and fallacies of personal dictatorship and proclaimed the rights of the human spirit.

It does these things, too, in Lewis Galantiere's translation, and both Anouilh and Galantiere are men of wit. The comedy they write is suave and adult—except when Creon's palace guards are made to talk like second-grade detectives in a gangster farce. They have made an interesting play, even though they did lose the tragedy along the way.

Miss Cornell has fine moments of brooding intensity as the girl who must bury her brother although she knows it means her death; she has a moment of tenderness with the fiance whom she will never marry; and she rises to bitter denunciation of her uncle Creon. But somehow Creon isn't quite bowled over—then, or later. Hardwicke has made Creon just too damned sure of himself.

The play runs one hour and thirty-five minutes, without intermission. It is acted before plain curtains. It moves smoothly. Horace Braham is admirably persuasive as the Chorus—but his lines are those of an amused cynic, and not those of an interpreter of the great and endless calamity that is mankind. The company includes Ruth Matteson, Wesley Addy and George Mathews.

The New York Times

FEBRUARY 19, 1946

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

As a practicing actress-manager, Katherine Cornell knows the value of an occasional experiment, of kicking aside the traces for the good of both herself and the theatre. No doubt it was this thought which prompted her to bring from Paris the script of Jean Anouilh's "Antigone," and, in an adaptation by Lewis Galantiere, to present it last evening at the Cort. Miss Cornell is entitled to respect for her experiment, and her company to credit for some excellent acting, but unhappily the story cannot conclude at that point. "Antigone" is not a full-bodied evening at the theatre. Where it should be moving and strong it too often seems empty. Too much of its length drifts away in unrationalized talk by characters who are not quite living human beings.

* * *

Although Sophocles is not mentioned, it is his tragedy which forms the basis for "Antigone". The Anouilh-Galantiere version follows the story of the daughter of Oedipus who, in burying her slain brother, defies Creon, the king. As Miss Cornell and her company offer it, the production is a mixture of the modern and classical. Physically, it is played on a stage almost bare, with three steps at the rear, and before a grey curtain. The women wear robes, the men wear dinner jackets, and the chorus is a cigarette-smoking man. The language also is of varied quality. There is poetry, there is modern slang, and homely expressions follow lyrical passages.

The anachronisms of expression, instead of bringing Sophocles to 1946, have a tendency to make him much less modern than he is. When the nurse fussily charges Antigone with having gone out "without a mouthful of breakfast," the sense of impending high tragedy is lost completely. With the one exception of Creon, the characters are badly drawn; if the authors planned to show them in current modern colors, they should have done so completely. "Antigone" opened in Paris during the Nazi occupancy, when a playwright could save his neck only by an extremely careful treatment of the state-versus-individual thesis. No doubt that fact may be responsible for some of the original weakness. But for New York and 1946 the play should be clearer.

* * *

The part of Antigone, for example, is not human; her actions lack logical motivation. Some of the time the Messrs. Anouilh and Galantiere are putting her efforts to bury her brother on the grounds of religion, some on those of personal freedom. On occasions Antigone even gives indications of plain stubbornness and the insistence that she die with or without reason. With her beauty and low, distinct voice, Miss Cornell never fails to get something out of a part, but even she cannot make Antigone as moving or as real as she should be. One scene, that with Cedric Hardwicke as Creon, finds the play and the two characters fully alive, but after that they drift again to the shadows.

Mr. Hardwicke's performance is excellent, and it does not detract from that to say Creon is the one honest role. Cynical, illusionless, the king has the theory of power making the right; and once in power, the ruler must keep his line. Mr. Hardwicke looks the tired but strong man; his voice and expressions are as logical as the even array of his thoughts and beliefs. Horace Braham is the chorus, and he tells the story, editorializes and chats with the audience, all in an easy, winning way. As the guard who captures Antigone, George Matthews is of the "dese" and "dem" school of cops, and while he does it well, the anachronism is too abrupt for comfort. Ruth Matteson is Ismene, the sister; Bertha Belmore, the nurse, and Wesley Addy, Haemon's son and Antigone's fiance. Guthrie McClintic directed.

Journal American

FEBRUARY 19, 1946

'Antigone' Offered At the Cort Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

You will, I'm sure, get from "Antigone" exactly what you bring to "Antigone." They give you nothing new at the Cort, nor do they take any important thing away.

The legend of the daughter of Oedipus, the King, and Jocasta, his Queen, was a wives' tale when, 2,400 years ago, Sophocles was young. All they do in this Galantiere-Anouilh transcription is tell it once again, underscoring any existent implications.

So, when much has been said and little has been done in 48th st., what "America's only actress-manager" has brought to town is a sort of WPA Living Newspaper account of the brotherly bumping-off of Princes Polynices, besieger of Thebes, and Eteocles, protector of Thebes, and their Uncle Creon's dictatorial determination that the one shall be buried with honors while the other shall be devoured by vultures.

It is easy to understand why, when boldly displayed in Paris during the German occupation, the Jean Anouilh condensed version of this ancient hocus-pocus assumed a pertinence infrequently evident here in New York.

"Antigone," with the enemy within your gates, is one thing. "Antigone," with no enemy in sight, is another. So, if it is excitation you crave at the Cort, you will have to bring it with you.

Admitting that, as both actress and manager, Katharine Cornell is doing her biggish bit for the art of the theatre, you must admit, and in the same breath, that all art and no play can make theatre-going a duty rather than a pleasure. "Antigone" leaves it to you!

* * *

There We Are!

What "Antigone" leaves to you is the contribution you must bring to its present boiled-down, pepped-up version. The Living Newspaper to be heard in 48th st. begins its verbal report at the moment when, having fallen fatally onto each other's sword, Prince Eteocles is to be brought in with honors and Prince Polynices is to be left out with vultures. No one, Uncle Creon dictates, can give him decent burial.

Antigone rules otherwise. With a mind of her own, single-tracked though that mind may be, she will cover her brother with good Thebian earth, even if she has to toughen her own tender hands. This she proceeds to do, in the face of a trio of Uncle Creon's hard-boiled henchmen. She is caught, as she always has been. Dragged before her mother's dictatorial brother, death is again her sentence and her reward.

And, as Lewis Galantiere, who translated this "Antigone" from the French of Jean Anouilh, who borrowed it from the Greek of Sophocles, points out in a "program note" of 1,500 words, our heroine's slaying, as is the case with martyrs, bears fruit only after she is gone. This fruit is the thing you are asked to bring to Katharine Cornell's latest, if not greatest, gift to her admirers.

This fruit, this thing, this contribution, as The Chorus says, is the ability to distinguish between the things which are Caesar's and the things which are God's, a passionate belief that moral law exists and a passionate regard for the sanctity of human personality ...And there, he adds, we are!

* * *

Actress-Manager

And there, indeed, we are, with Katharine Cornell, actress to her own manager, giving a sultry, unreasonable impersonation of a sultry, unreasonable Antigone.

America's only actress-manager, in the 15th play of her 15 years of acting-managing, gives more to the Greek who has words for it than the Greek who has words for it gives back to her. She is also strangely beautiful!

Howard Braham is excellent and explanatory as the M. C. known as Chorus. Quite an impassioned pessimist! "All those who were meant to die, have died. Those who believed one thing, those who believed the contrary thing, and even those who believed nothing, yet were caught up in the web without knowing why. All dead: useless, rotting."

Yet, as even he admits, Creon was the most rational.

And that is the way Cedric Hardwicke acts him. Because he does, "Antigone" is Sir Cedric's play when it is not the play of the First Guard who is George Mathews. For The Dictator and his Leading Henchman alone manage to provide the ancient legend with the 20th Century parallels the play, the players and the production strive for. The rest, I fear, is merely big-time little-theatre...

As the final curtain falls, Chorus moves down-stage to point out that "only the guards are left," that "none of this matters to them," that "it is no skin off their noses."

Well, it matters not to me, either, and the skin on my nose is unappreciatively intact.

"Antigone"—*continued*

PM Exclusive

FEBRUARY 20, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

When Greek Meets Greek...

PM Reviews

The abiding figures of history and legend have—or can be made to have—a special meaning for every age, for every turn of the political or philosophical wheel. From Addison's *Cato* to Orson Welles' *Julius Caesar* the stage has given a contemporary twist to an antique tale. During the Nazi occupation of Paris, Jean Anouilh contrived a highly topical version of Sophocles' *Antigone*, in which Antigone's defiance of King Creon's edict that her brother Polyceites remain unburied symbolized resistance to Nazi tyranny. In writing such a play, M. Anouilh had obviously to walk a tightrope. He had to keep the import of his drama from becoming too overt; he had to make Creon much more than a conventional despot, and Antigone something less than a conventional heroine. He had, indeed, to write a play that could cut two ways—that could placate the Germans, yet satisfy the French.

Katharine Cornell has now brought *Antigone* to Broadway. Here, one is still mindful of the symbolism in the play. But one watches it with none of the emotional involvments, the playing-with-fire excitement of an oppressed Parisian; and Anouilh's drama is now to be judged on more objective and strictly theatrical terms. The theatrical terms are in themselves provocative enough; for beyond being topical, *Antigone* was passably experimental. It not only altered Sophocles' story in small ways, and some of his characters in large ones. It is much of it colloquial; it brings in modern references along with modern dress; and it is played, against a neutral background, without intermission.

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The result is now and then arresting enough, and for one long crucial scene very sharp theater; but *Antigone*, as a whole, does not come off. For one thing, not enough of it is good drama, even in the Greek sense, which neither demands nor desires much action. M. Anouilh has added to the story—contrived his own kind of rather otiose 'Chorus,' thrown in a nurse here, a love scene there. But he has only added flatness, for except when Creon and Antigone come to grips, the play is pretty much of a dead weight. It is not simply on dramatic grounds, however, that *Antigone* suffers. The whole interpretation strengthens Creon's hand rather than Antigone's, for the plain reason that Antigone is badly characterized and cloudily motivated; and the modern angling of the play collides with the completely unmodern axis of the plot.

In modernizing the story, Anouilh has, in a way, dropped it out of the frying pan into the fire. He has been most successful, as it happens, where he has been most adventurous: in his characterization of Creon. His Creon is an intellectual worldling, an urbane opportunist, who chiefly refuses Polyceites burial to conciliate the mob. The clash that Anouilh has contrived between Creon and Antigone, between worldliness and idealism, suggests many other such scenes in the theater, notably the brilliant trial scene in *Saint Joan*. But where Joan, as a true mystic, can hold her own against her inquisitors, Antigone, being hazily characterized, is squashed by the encounter. Anouilh's Antigone, unlike Sophocles', is not moved by religious feelings; far more than Sophocles', she is shown to be passionately and happily in love with Creon's son, and passionately, preternaturally in love with life; and beyond that, she never liked her brother and had not seen him for years. Saddled with the burial theme, Anouilh can only portray Antigone as a sort of fanatic about "principle". And he cannot make *us* believe she is even that. As an inspirational figure for an occupied Paris, she undoubtedly had her value; as a human being, she is quite unreal.

• • •

Miss Cornell is obviously hampered by so badly-drawn a part, but her acting does little to clarify or strengthen it. She just does not seem at home as Antigone. In the well-drawn role of Creon, on the other hand, Cedric Hardwicke plays brilliantly. He has address and authority; and so long as he holds the stage, *Antigone* has a cold sharpness and vigor.

I suspect that, despite Mr. Galantiere's painstaking translation, *Antigone* in French had qualities of writing that have been lost in English. But as a play, it has largely ceased to be striking as it has ceased to be timely.

—Louis Kronenberger

New York World-Telegram

FEBRUARY 19, 1946

By Burton Rascoe

Ancient 'Antigone' Emerges Bright, New

I am frank to confess that if I had not long been familiar with the Sophoclean text of "Antigone" and had come upon it for the first time in the modern adaptation of it at the Cort last night, I probably should have been repelled by its thesis and mystified, if not actually annoyed, by the manner of its unfoldment.

But, inasmuch as this was the first time I had ever seen it presented on the stage in any form, I sat throughout its hour and 40 minutes of uninterrupted playing time in rapt attention, with a lump once in my throat, and with unqualified admiration for the perception and skill with which Guthrie McClintic has directed it and for the dignity and finesse with which Katherine Cornell and her company enact it.

It was an experience in the theater I shall not soon forget, I am grateful to Miss Cornell and Gilbert Miller for undertaking it, to all those connected with the presentation, to Jean Anouilh for the French adaptation of the 2500-year-old drama, and to Lewis Galantiere, the sensitive bi-lingual translator, who has recreated Mr. Anouilh's adaptation. On the part of all of them, this an act of faith in the finer things of the theater and more than a cultural gesture in recognition of our link, through the centuries, with the life of Greece during its great age of art and enlightenment.

Emphasis Shifted.

Mr. Anouilh, being a Frenchman, and Mr. Galantiere, being an American, have between them shifted the emphasis of Sophocles' drama in order to give it meaning for us today—a meaning very much alive in France ever since the Dreyfus affair. The issues in that momentous civil war of words and emotions were clear cut. The Dreyfusards held that the rights and dignity of the individual are more important thant the state. The anti-Dreyfusards held that the state is totalitarian governance and the rights of the individual must be subjugated and sacrificed (as in contemporary Russia) for the power and the glory of the state.

The "Antigone" at the Cort is, to that extent, more French than Greek. And this is a very good thing. For, frankly, the conventions and motivations of Greek tragedy are insupportable to us now, however much we may rejoice in the eloquence and imagery of its dialog and however pleased we may be to find that human nature was pretty much the same in the days when Sophocles and Euripides were competing for the prize for tragedy as it is now. I could have settled for more adaptation—an adaptation substituting some modern motive for Antigone's defiance of Creon which resulted in her immuration and suicide and in the suicide of her lover, Haemon, and his mother.

Scholars worshipful toward classical Greek tragedy are, nevertheless, ready to admit that it is difficult, if not impossible, for a modern to enter into its spirit because its conventions are so inexorable and its superstitions so barbaric. No one last night, I imagine, could feel why it was so important to Antigone, knowing she would be put to death for it, to sprinkle a handful of dust over the mangled body of Polynices in defiance Creon's orders that the body be left unburied as a warning to all who take up arms against their own country.

To a modern it would seem that Creon had the right of things there. But to the common man among the Greeks Creon's order was the most horrifying of sacrileges, for it doomed the spirit of Polynices forever to suffer on earth and never enjoy the peace of Hades. To us Antigone (Miss Cornell) was a wilful and stupid girl, with a flair for martyrdom. And Creon (Cedric Hardwicke) was a patient, sympathetic and troubled king whose greatest sin was the hubris of thinking, like Hague of New Jersey, that he was the law and that a violation of one of his edicts would bring about the complete collapse of authority and order.

Some of us who have studied "Antigone" with care are irreverent enough to consider it, with all its portentous eloquence, the "East Lynne" of Greek drama. Nor did the splendid and tasteful presentation of it last night, against a simple background of classical Greek drapes by Raymond Sovey, with the principals in modern evening dress or mufti and with George Mathews playing a Maxie Rosenbloom role to the hilt, cause me to change my opinion. But, of course, "East Lynne" is a classic, too.

The Sun

FEBRUARY 19, 1946

Miss Cornell's 'Antigone' Bold Experiment, but Not Very Stimulating Theater.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Katharine Cornell brings her unearthly beauty of voice and her extraordinary feeling for tragedy to the role of the resolute heroine of "Antigone," who dies for a principle, in the production which opened last night at the Cort. It is an interesting oddity, boldly experimental. But it isn't particularly stimulating theater and must be put down as one of Miss Cornell's lesser offerings.

"Antigone," directed by Guthrie McClintic, is done in colloquial speech and played in modern dress. It is Sophocles paraphrased by the French dramatist, Jean Anouilh, whose play was adapted by Lewis Galantiere. And now the production is brought to Broadway by Miss Cornell, in association with Gilbert Miller.

A story of a woman's instincts and emotions matched against the cold logic of an austere, political-minded and tyrannical king, "Antigone" runs for an hour and forty minutes in actual playing time. For much of the way it is singularly unmoving. The play is also thrown somewhat off balance by the fact that Creon, in the clash with Antigone, comes forth as the more believable character. And, with all the respect of an observer who has been one of Miss Cornell's devoted followers for a quarter of a century, it is Sir Cedric Hardwicke who gives the performance of the evening.

"Antigone," as revealed last night at the Cort, presents the legend of the defiance of the tragedy-bound daughter of Oedipus in burying her brother, Polynices, notwithstanding the royal edict of her uncle, the king of Thebes, that the body was to be left to rot in the sun. Antigone refuses to relent when Creon tells her that her brother was a blackguard, a rebel and a traitor. So death is the penalty decreed for her offense and it's a death that she welcomes in preference to life under Creon's rule and conditions. She hangs herself with the cord of her robe in the cave in which she is entombed.

It is a sceneryless production. The play is presented without an intermission. The chaste setting of Raymond Sovey is one of a curtained background, with doorways downstage on either side. The properties consist of three chairs, a bare table, a pair of handcuffs, a gong offstage. Guthrie McClintic's direction emphasizes the colloquial treatment.

Miss Cornell, somewhat nervous in her first-night performance, plays Antigone as a creature of wisdom and heroism, of anguish and pity, and hers is a portrayal that has both beauty and poignance, but the text of the play is such that her character is often made to seem inordinately stubborn and the loser in the argument with the implacable Creon.

Sir Cedric Hardwicke, wearing a white tie, is explicit, precise and tremendously forceful as the ruthless king—a remarkably polished performance at all times. Horace Brahms, in a dinner jacket, has the assignment as the chorus and narrator and handles his long speeches casually and expertly. George Matthews is tough, brusque and amusing as the puzzled guard who found Antigone clawing at the earth like an animal to cover the body of her dead. There are good performances from Wesley Addy, playing Haemon, and Ruth Matteson as Antigone's sister, also caught up in the web of tragedy.

"Antigone" has moments of eloquence but it is not an impressive play. It is, to me, an experiment that doesn't come off. It is a fill-in attraction that will not overtax Miss Cornell's strength until she turns, of course, to pieces of more substance. To "Macbeth," I hope. Or to "Antony and Cleopatra."

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New York Post

FEBRUARY 19, 1946

Katharine Cornell Opens In Long-Awaited 'Antigone'

By VERNON RICE

Those of you who go to the Cort expecting an emotional bath had better not stop there, but journey on down the street and see a movie.

Those of you who go, however, expecting a provocative play and a distinguished performance will get them from "Antigone" and Katharine Cornell.

That it is an entirely satisfying evening in the theatre is something else again.

Based on the tragedy of Sophocles, this story of drama's first feminist by the French writer, Jean Anouilh, adapted into English by Lewis Galantiere, has the suggestion of Greek tragedy but none of its sweep or emotional impact.

Unquestionably that is how the writers, Miss Cornell, who produced it in association with Gilbert Miller, and Guthrie McClintic, who staged the play, wanted it.

They did a lot of borrowing, though, from the traditions of the Greek theatre. It is too bad they couldn't go whole-hog and take everything. Then they would have had more than an interesting evening in the theatre. They would have had one to make one's hair stand on end.

Mr. McClintic went to the original source and took away the use of the minimum of props and no scenery. In this case gray drapes and three levels were used. In costuming the players he had Valentina dress the men in evening clothes but the women in gowns which had movement and flow, but scarcely a suggestion of period. And the play is done in its entirety without an intermission.

Playwrights, Too, Borrow

In telling the story the playwright, or playwrights, went back and came up with a Chorus, who verbally sets the stage, tells the necessary exposition and foretells what is to come.

The predestined tragedy is there, too. Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, knows that by burying her brother's body she is breaking the law set down by her uncle, Creon, now king of Thebes, and is doomed to death. The audience knows, as well, that she cannot escape her ultimate end. It also knows, as does Antigone, that tragedy will come to Creon for breaking the will of the gods.

Creon's tragedy, of course, is that his son, Haemon, dies with Antigone, and his wife, upon hearing of their son's death, kills herself.

First Rate Performances

Miss Cornell, playing the title role, gives the performance one has come to expect from her. Her regal bearing, her tragic, mobile face, the graceful movement of her hands and the lyric quality of her voice all give Antigone dignity and quiet, yet explosive, fire.

In Cedric Hardwicke, as Creon, the actress-manager has a foil of no small magniture. Sir Cedric's own playing personality fits well into the role as written and he can bring out some good in every villain he enacts. His strong face, his soft though positive voice, and his own self-assurance always work the charm.

Wesley Addy returns to the theatre after four and a half years in the artillery to play Haemon, son of Creon and husband-to-be of Antigone. The years in the army have done Mr. Addy no harm, and his love scene with Miss Cornell was a beautiful and stirring thing to behold.

Ruth Matteson as Ismene, Antigone's sister, is lovely to look upon, and the rest of the players were cast with the usual Cornell care.

Program Note

In an informative program note, Mr. Galantiere tells of the play's production in Occupied France in 1943. Not only did it have to satisfy the French and give them some hope, but it had to satisfy the Germans as well.

Inasmuch as there are some strong, unfavorable hints regarding dictators in the script, that was a very difficult job to do, indeed.

Perhaps that accounts for the confusion that exists in the play; not so much from what it says; but what it doesn't say. Historically interesting though it may be, Anouilh's "Antigone" still does not lend itself to an evening of fulfillment in the theatre.

It must be admitted that it is, however, the first really thought-provoking play to come along for some time.

But like the Bible, it is hard to improve upon the original.

Even if the original came from some place else.